



**TRAVIS INDIVIDAU L PIECE
TITLE**

**WRITTEN BY:
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Professional Writing and Rhetoric
Major, Medium Liberal Arts
University, Southeastern U.S.

**IMAGE OF:
KATHI YANCEY + TRAVIS MAYNARD**

Photo by Tarez Graban. Tallahassee,
Florida, 2019

Q FOR QUESTION

ABSTRACT

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I begin with a paraphrase and two quotations from Kathi:

“ **IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO SOMETHING LARGER THAN YOURSELF.**”
- An advising meeting at Florida State, in Williams Building 223

“WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO KEEP YOURSELF ALIVE? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO KEEP YOURSELF MOTIVATED SO THAT YOU CONTINUE TO BE FULLY ENGAGED?”
- “Q for Question”

“...IF WE UNDERSTOOD MORE ABOUT [STUDENTS], WE WOULD DO A BETTER JOB TEACHING, AND NOT JUST PEDAGOGY, WE WOULD HAVE A DIFFERENT CURRICULUM.”
- “Q for Question”

These three pieces of wisdom distill the influence Kathi has had on my understanding of the field, my role within it, and the motivations behind my research. I came to Florida State in the summer of 2012, having received a Bachelor’s in Writing, Rhetoric, and Communication two years prior. Because my undergraduate education in a writing and rhetoric major was such a fulfilling and eye-opening experience, I knew entering my graduate training I wanted to pay it forward—to eventually start, grow, or contribute to a major—to contribute to something larger than myself.

As my studies progressed, I learned about the field’s ongoing journey to disciplinarity and undergraduate major programs representing a stepping stone on that journey; as these ideas began to coalesce in my mind, the scope of my ambition expanded, allowing me to see how my work within a single program could contribute to larger disciplinary initiatives—how I could contribute to something *even larger* than myself.

In our video segment, Kathi mentions being internally-motivated by topics and subjects important to her. And while I share that internal motivation guides my individual research interests, **I am externally motivated by collective rewards for the field:** institutional recognition of our disciplinarity and cultural recognition of the work we do in preparing students to navigate increasingly complex sociopolitical and professional writing environments.



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And so in that spirit, I respond to Kathi's question with a question:

How do we stay alive, motivated and engaged—as individuals in the discipline, and as a discipline in a sociopolitical environment increasingly hostile to education, the humanities, and seemingly humanity?

I won't delude myself into thinking I have the definitive answer to that question, but I hope my research in undergraduate writing majors can provide some insight.

My story so far has had a happy ending. I am fortunate enough to teach in the Professional Writing and Rhetoric major at Elon University, alongside colleagues who are equally invested in the idea behind my third epigraph:

DEVELOPING RESEARCH-INFORMED CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGIES RESPONSIVE TO STUDENTS' LIFEWIDE WRITING BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE MAJOR.



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Research projects like these not only keep us invested in learning about students, but they keep us alive by helping us deliver the best education we can. This thread of my research began with my dissertation work with Kathi: an alumni study of Florida State's Editing, Writing, and Media (EWM) major.

Kathi encouraged me to design the with **an assemblage mindset**, a practice I continue to this day: cobbling together her theory of the **delivered, lived, and experienced** curriculum with the methods of previous alumni studies, I sought to identify **a)** how alums' prior lives shaped their undergraduate experiences, **b)** impactful curricular and co-curricular experiences, and **c)** if and how the major influences their current writing lives.

The findings of this research suggested opportunities for both local revisions to the EWM major and the design of new major programs to better prepare students for their lives after graduation.

To that end, we should continue asking a question that writing transfer scholars have been for some time:

How can we better harness students' previous and co-curricular lifewide writing as it develops into lifespan writing?

In addition to the student-centered possibilities of these research findings, they can also serve a more cynical purpose: keeping us alive by demonstrating our value in the neoliberal marketplace.

Like previous alumni studies, my research collects data on the professional paths graduates take and the products and processes defining their writing in the private, public, and non-profit sectors—allowing us to keep track of emerging trends and adapt our pedagogies to better prepare students for their professional writing.

Better prepared students get better jobs, earn more, give back to the university, etc., and that data can be leveraged at the institutional level to recruit new students, create new programs, or protect existing ones from austerity measures.

However, we need to extend these arguments beyond our local contexts; we need more data from several institutions to show the positive effects writing and rhetoric has on students. To do so, a sustained research agenda focusing on the co-curricular and post-curricular writing lives of students is imperative.

With these thoughts in mind, I offer two final questions:

How can we encourage researchers to take up Replicable, Aggregable, Data-driven research? How can we be better privilege RAD research in our publishing forums?

And perhaps more cynically:

How can we demonstrate our neoliberal value while retaining our commitments to the humanities and social justice?

